

# THE MOSLEMS IN CHINA and THEIR STRUGGLE WITH COMMUNISM

by

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From the very beginning, the Communist regime in what had been the Russian Empire adopted an actively hostile policy against all religions, persecuting the clergy and their followers. The struggle between religion and the Communist ideology continues in the Soviet Union to this day. The Soviet press constantly reports the persistence of strong religious feeling at all levels of the Soviet society, and the Communist Party constantly uses the use of more effective anti-religious propaganda and other countermeasures. It is of great interest to students of Soviet affairs to observe the parallel struggle with religion in Communist China, where much of the program and many of the difficulties are similar, particularly in relation to the adherents of Islam. The two Communist struggles against Islam are also related because the Moslems in the Soviet Union and those in Communist China are neighbours, separated only by a political border.

After the seizure of power in China, the Chinese Communists pursued the same policy against religion and philosophical teachings of a religious character as the Soviet Communists had in USSR. The Chinese have long maintained their own particular views on religion, views which are largely bound up, first with pragmatism of the Chinese character, and secondly with strong influence of Confucianism, a philosophical and not a religious system, which embraced all fields of Chinese life. Consequently, the edge of Communist propaganda in China was primarily directed against Confucianism. The Chinese Communist Party set out to destroy the family structure of Chinese life which recognized two basic forms of virtue: obedience to the Emperor and obedience to one's parents.

In its campaign against Confucianism Communist propaganda even made use of Lao-tse, who was definitely a mystic and, therefore, from the Communist point of view, even more of a "reactionary" than Confucius. Communist ideologists tried to depict Lao-tse as a materialist and drew on ancient Chinese tradition in their attacks on Confucianism.

A purely religious system with which the Chinese Communists came to blows was Buddhism. Chinese Buddhism, however, is very different from Tibetan Lamaism, mainly in that it has no ecclesiastical organization and no clerical hierarchy. Chinese Buddhism has never had a patriarch or Synod: it has never had a supreme clerical body to which all Buddhists were subordinated. The head of Buddhism in old China was the Emperor, as the Son of Heaven. With the fall of the monarchy, Buddhism became the religion of the individual in isolation, who, in the final analysis, decides independently between good and evil.

Like Indian Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism was a passive, monastic religion which demanded of man withdrawal into the world beyond. Apart from its lack of a clear-cut religious organization, Chinese Buddhism had a further weakness in its struggle against Communism in that, recognizing all manner of existence generally as evil, it could oppose no other ideal to Communism than a radical withdrawal from life.

However, China had, and still has, two powerful religious systems which have stood up successfully to Communism: Roman Catholicism and Islam, and the Chinese Communists have waged a particularly determined campaign against these religions.

In an attempt to subject local Catholicism to the control of the state and party authorities, the Chinese Communists demanded that local Catholics recognize a "National Catholic Church" with a Pope in Peking. So far, however, they have not succeeded in this attempt aimed at paralyzing the Vatican's influence, and the Communist authorities continue to combat Catholicism by administrative sanctions.

The more serious problem for the Chinese Communists is Islam. Their task in this regard is more difficult because of the fact that, whereas the Chinese Catholics are widely dispersed about the country and have no territorial base of their own, the more than forty million Moslems of China are concentrated in a few border provinces and have retained their traditional way of life. Thus there is no opportunity for combatting the Moslems and their faith by isolating them completely from the outside world.

The clash between the Moslems and the Chinese Communists takes on a marked political flavor since the Moslems living in China are in large part not of Chinese nationality. They are mostly Uighurs, Kazakhs, Kirgiz, Uzbeks, Tatars, and Adzhiks etc., many of them of the same stock as Moslems in the Soviet Union. In the past few decades a movement for national liberation has gained force among these peoples, and they have been a main target of discriminatory measures by the Chinese Communists.

Reports in the central and provincial Chinese press enable us to piece together a fairly clear picture of what is taking place in these Chinese border provinces, where the Moslem population is desperately resisting all efforts at Communization.

As far as can be judged from official Chinese press reports, Moslems in these provinces have two national-political programs, a minimum and a maximum. The minimum program demands religious freedom and religious independence came into the limelight in the middle of 1955 when the Communists began to organize the peoples communes in other areas. An anxiety grew in the Moslem provinces that sooner or later an attempt would be made to set up communes among the Moslems too. Such a development would clearly mean a break with their traditional way of life and would greatly weaken their religious

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organizations. The Communists chose this time to set up propaganda among the Moslems for the national unity of all the peoples of China. A campaign was launched to educate China's national minorities in the spirit of new, socialism patriotism. The campaign was accompanied by violent attacks on "local, bourgeois patriotism" and demands for its eradication.

On February 15, 1958 the Peking journal Philosophical Research published a long article, intended for China's national minorities, and defining the new patriotism. The article stated:

"The Communist Party requires that all religious people continue to learn patriotism and acquire socialist education. To be patriotic one must love socialism and the New China under the leadership of the Communist Party. That is to say, one must love the socialist fatherland and travel the road of socialism. We therefore demand that religious people support the Chinese Communist Party and the peoples government and travel the road to socialism."

The article added that every religious believer who feels himself incapable of fulfilling this demand would be regarded by the Party as a counterrevolutionary and a member of the "rightest bourgeois conspiracy". He could expect no mercy and would sooner or later fall victim of the "peoples wrath",

Most Moslems spiritual leaders in China regarded this statement as heralding the end of religious tolerance which the Chinese Communists had repeatedly promised them. The full force of the anti-religious propaganda and the arrest of some hundreds of believers confirmed their suspicions.

On May 14, 1958 the paper Min Chu Huan reported the arrest of Tia Ben Hui, a "rightest" Moslem from Shantung, for spreading rumors that the Communist Party intended to eliminate religion. Another "rightest" was arrested in Honan for saying that the Communist Party intended to wipe out the national minorities and their religion. (1) "Rightest bourgeois elements" in the province of Anwei were reported to have stated that the Communist policy of educating "cadres of Communist workers and indoctrinating the youth of the Moslem Ahun tribe is aimed at destroying the tone of Islam". (2)

Somewhat earlier the same feelings had become apparent in the province of Hopei. A man named Liu Shing min, who was arrested here, was reported by the paper Hopei Jih Bao to have said: "Although the Communist Party has repeatedly stated, orally and in writing, that it adheres to a policy of religious tolerance, in fact it never fulfills its promises. The Communist Party intends to wipe out all religions." (3)

The concrete demands of the minimum program of the Moslem minorities were formulated on April 8, 1958, by the paper Liaoning Jih Bao, which declared that the Moslem leaders of the Uighur people were striving for independence from party control, which they regarded as interference in the internal affairs of of the people. The paper continued: "They hold that the Uighur people should be allowed to manage their own affairs, and that the imams are their leaders, since mosques are outside the control of the Party and government. They believe that cadres of their nationalities cannot understand their psychology and lead them."

Careful study of such reports in the Chinese Party press leads to the conviction that such demands are being addressed to the Chinese Communist Party not only by the Uighur people, but also by the spiritual leaders of all other Moslems of China as well. Since the Chinese Communist Party has shown no sign of yielding to the Moslem minorities on this point of autonomy in their religious affairs, the Moslem religious leaders put forward a political maximal program calling for complete secession of the Moslem province from China. The existence of such demands was discussed at a conference in Inchang, attended by local Party representatives and representatives of the Communist organized Chinese Islamic Association. The conference noted that most Moslem leaders were demanding the formation of an "Islamic kingdom" in the provinces inhabited by Moslems, and that this slogan had been greeted with enthusiasm by the Moslem population of the border province.

The Conference also noted that the Moslems had long since passed from declarations to action, so that local state and Party authorities were obliged to deal with numerous armed uprisings which could only be suppressed by force of arms.

The uprisings, it was reported, were usually controlled by major political or religious leaders. The Inchang Conference condemned Abdullin Ma Veng-chu, vice President of The Chinese Islamic Association and a member of the preparatory Committee of the autonomous district of Ningsia Hui in the province of Kansu, who was accused of having organized a number of revolts against the Communist regime in this province. Ma was said to have instigated at least three such uprisings, the last of which occurred on April 4, 1958, in the autonomous district of Changtsiangchuan Hui under the slogan "Kill all Communist cadres and the state trading organizations." The rebellion had been put down by regular units of the Chinese Liberation Army.

After the suppression of this uprising, Ma was said to have tried to raise a fourth revolt in the Tusin region, he had been killed in the process, but documents found on his body had revealed that the aim of the revolt was "to form an independent Hui (Moslem) Republic." The organization behind the revolt was called the "Democratic Moslem Party", the ne

parliament was intended to "embody all religious organizations, the army and all political parties with the exception of the Communists." (4) In the beginning of May, the Conference reported, a new uprising had developed in the same region under the slogan: "Avenge the death of our spiritual leader Ma and affirm the fame of Islam for time without end."

The statements of the Lihhang Conference are borne out by central and provincial Chinese press reports for the period. Here are few instances:

On May 14, 1958, the paper Min Chu Huan reported that Tin Veng-hao, a "rightist" from the Ahun people, had instigated a major armed conflict between representatives of the Hui and Han (Chinese) peoples in the town of Linchin, Shantung Province. In the same issue the paper accused imam Bun En-chin of repeatedly inciting the Hui to rise against the Han people in the town of Shinlin, Shantung Province.

On May 18, 1958, the paper Kuang Min Jih Bao gave evidence that the Moslem disturbances and revolts were not restricted to the Chinese border provinces. The paper reported a heavy armed clash between government troops and "rebelious" peasants from the village of Lun Tsun, led by the local imam. The vanguard of the revolt was formed by three hundred Moslems.

On May 29, 1958, the same paper reported that Moslems in Honan Province had attempted to "set up an exclusively Moslem area, settled by Hui people, by driving out all members of the Han people." The paper went on to say that in many parts of the country "the Hui people refuse to work with the Han people, refuse to learn from them and are continually provoking conflict and discord between the various nationalities."

Another report of an uprising in the Moslem area of China comes from Taipeh and is based on the accounts of the refugees from Sinkiang who are now living in Pakistan. According to these reports a large revolt took place in southwest Sinkiang on March 20, 1959. Some 10,000 men led by four Moslem chiefs stormed the local prison and freed 600 prisoners, killing 50 Communist wardens and officials in the process. They then seized the granaries and distributed the grain to the public. After six days, however, the revolt was crushed by regular troops sent from Urumchi, the capitol of Sinkiang. (5)

Analysis of these and similar reports gives a clear picture of the reasons for the continued Moslem unrest. It is mainly caused by Communist methods of administration, by interference in the religious life of the local population, by substitution of the phonetic Chinese alphabet for the Arabic script, by deletion of the Arabic language from the school curriculum by the cooperative movement and by forcibly encouraged mixed marriages between Moslems and Chinese.

On February 12, 1958, the paper Inner Mongolia published an article entitled "Criticise the Local Nationalism of the Hui Peoples More Energetically," which stated that nationalists among the Hui people were aiming pernicious attacks at the Party in an attempt to destroy its guiding role. According to the paper, the Hui nationalists had, among other arguments aimed at the Chinese Communist Party, asserted that the problem of the Hui people and that of Islam were identical, and to separate the Hui people from Islam would mean the extinction of the Hui people and the weakening of Islam. The Hui leaders had attacked Hui "progressives" and Hui members of the Communist Party and the Young Communist League and had called Hui Party members secret agents, implying that they were traitors to the interests of the Hui people, or kafirs, i.e. infidels. Some Hui leaders had emphasized the special characteristics of the Hui people and had opposed enterprises undertaken jointly by the state and private interests. They had said, "when the Huis work with the Hans in the same cooperatives, they receive food rations which are inedible," a reference to the fact that Moslems have been forced at times to eat pork, contrary to their religious beliefs. Many Hui leaders and people had opposed intermarriage between the Huis and the Hans because they were afraid that their habits and customs would not in all cases be respected. And, the paper concluded, certain Hui leaders regarded Arabic as the language of the Hui people and complained that it was not taught in the primary schools for Hui children.

Reports of symptoms of "local patriotism" and the causes for its appearance can be found in other Chinese Communist papers. On June 27, 1958, for instance, Jen Min Jih Bao reported an outbreak of "local patriotism" in Sinkiang and added that those responsible had been "punished in keeping with the gravity of their errors and the depth of their repentance." On August 25, 1958 Sinkiang Jih Bao published a long article listing a series of mistakes and deviations committed by local Sinkiang leaders. The paper noted that there was a continuing struggle between "local nationalists" defending religion and Communists preaching dialectical materialism and trying to assimilate national minorities on the bases of socialism and Communism. A similar report was given by the paper Kuang Min Hih Bao on May 29, 1958:

In a number of joint-nationalities cooperatives there has been clamor for setting up separate cooperatives. For instance, such a clamor was made in half of the Han and Hui joint cooperatives in Kaifeng. Many people wanted to withdraw from joint cooperatives or production squads and to engage in independent farming... In many districts the Hui people rejected the Hans and were unwilling to learn from them, constantly causing disputes among the various nationalities. When Han cadres went

to some Hui villages to work, the Hui peoples secretly slaughtered draft cattle, bought goods under the state unified purchasing and marketing plan by illegitimate methods, violated market control regulations and even beat up cadres,, The Hui people exaggerated the differences between various nationalities, emphasized their peculiar conditions and made unreasonable demands for longer holidays and a greater supply of food, grain and edible oils.

Another cause of the Chinese Moslems ceaseless resistance to Communism is the mass confiscation of ecclesiastical property. Despite the fact that the Chinese Communist constitution and other legislation formally guarantee the inviolability of waqif (ecclesiastical property administration) lands, state appropriation of these lands in fact began as early as 1953. It was then that the first waves of dispute on this topic appeared.

The confiscation of waqif lands in the Moslem areas of China reached a peak in early 1958. As a rule, confiscation pursued a general pattern. Communist pressure was brought to bear on the imam of the local Mosque to announce his voluntary enrollment in the cooperative, which then automatically annexed the waqif land. When a program of this kind was initiated in Hopei Province in January 1958 the Party press began to be filled with reports of resistance from the local population. On January 20, 1958, the paper Hopei Jih wao reported the arrest of several persons who had been "spreading rumors that the confiscation of waqif lands is only the first step toward the liquidation of Islam as a religion." According to the paper, all these "seditious elements demanded the return of the land confiscated from the Mosques and spoke out against socialism and socialist construction in their province." Soon after this the Communist Party met with other difficulty. In an attempt to force the imams to surrender waqif land voluntarily to the cooperatives, the Communists tried to deprive such land of its labor force. However, the imams appealed to Moslem believers, and masses of the local population responded to appeal by voluntary work on waqif land.

The Moslems objected to the cooperatives mainly on religious grounds. On June 14, 1958, Min Chu Huan reported that Se si-san, a "rightist" from Honan had stated: "the larger cooperatives become, the worse it will be for the Hui people." He had also said that the main aim of cooperatives was to destroy religion.

The fiercest Moslem resistance, however, has been aroused by the Communist campaign to abolish the use of Arabic alphabet in schools and to replace it with the Cyrillic alphabet. The reform was begun in 1950 and in 1956 was applied to all schools in the Chinese border provinces. The Chinese Communists have maintained that the reform has no political connotations, and in particular that it does not represent an attempt to detach the Moslems of China from their Moslem brothers abroad. On September 7, 1956 the paper Kuan Min Jih T'ao tried to explain the reform by saying that the Arabic script could not reflect all the shades of pronunciation in Uighur dialect of the Turkic language. Objections that the Uighurs had been using this alphabet for more than 800 years were countered with the retort that this was all the more reason for making the change now and joining the stream of modern culture and civilization, a stream from which the Chinese Moslems, the paper added, were cut off by their retention of the Arabic alphabet.

Not only was the Arabic script officially replaced by the Cyrillic, but the Chinese government categorically forbade the study of Arabic in schools or at home. On February 24, 1958, the paper Inner Mongolia commented on this decision:

"Some people who are confused have emphasized that Arabic should be taught in primary schools for Hui children. It is permissible for such schools to impart some common knowledge about the Hui people, but if Arabic is taught to children, it will be a disadvantage to their intellectual development of cultural and educational surprises for the Hui people."

Interference such as this in the spiritual and cultural tradition of the Chinese Moslems engenders hatred, not only of Communism, but of everything Chinese. Evidence of this can be found in correspondence between local Chinese and Moslem representatives published in NO. 20 (1958) of the journal Chinese Youth. In one letter a member of the Young Communist League complained that Moslem families generally oppose mixed marriages and that this has been the cause of the break-up of his own marriage. The writer pointed out that Moslem parents consider it a disgrace to marry their daughters to Chinese and fear that, by entering such a marriage, their daughters will become completely isolated from their own people and members of their faith. They also fear that the Chinese husband will not respect Moslem customs and habits. They therefore threaten a daughter with a parental curse if she should decide to marry a Chinaman against their wishes.



The reply to this letter, written by journal's editor, raised the question whether a Chinese husband should respect Hui customs. The editor board thought he should, and added that all these customs must in any case be destroyed, since they hindered progress and socialism.

In an attempt to gain allies in its struggle against Moslem religious traditions and customs, the Chinese Communists have sought to convert some of the Moslem clergy into a tool for the propagation of their policy. By bribery and terror the Communists have succeeded in forcing some "progressive" imams to work on their side. On January 11, 1958, the paper Hopei Jih Bao reported:

"Many imams use every opportunity to propagate among the masses the Party's policy of freedom of religious belief, quickly transmit to the Party and government the views and demands of the Hui people, and have done much to strengthen national solidarity. In particular, they have actively accepted socialist transformation, helping the Party and the government in their work. They have been successful in bringing about closer relations between the Party and the Hui masses. Their achievements and their political and ideological progress are valuable and credit to the Moslem faith."

However, the Communist press itself admits that the Chinese Communists are not driving the maximum profit from these traitors to Islam. When they become "progressive" and take the Communist side, the imams lose their influence among the believers and are only used as figureheads for propaganda. Moreover, there are always those among the Moslem believers who are prepared to unmask them publicly and thus sap their authority once and for all. References to this weakness can be found in the official press. On January 11, 1958, for instance, Hopei Jih Bao, in an article cited earlier, announced that the "rightest" Liu Sheng min had been arrested for openly stating that imams who had deserted to the side of the Party were "the black sheep of Hui people," who "sell their faith for comforts and luxury." On August 23, 1958, Kansu Jih Bao reported another "rightest" had called the "progressive" imams "poisonous snakes, nurtured by the Communist Party against Islam." The pages of the official press also contain attacks on these renegade clerics by imams who have remained true to Islam. On May 16, 1958, Jen Min Jih Bao reported that a group of imams in nonan had called the "progressive" imams "people without faith or religion", for whom there is no hope, "nither in this world or the next". Hun En Chin, a "rightest" imam from Shantung stated, according to Jen Min Jih Bao of May 18, 1958, that "the progressive imams sell their souls for the glory of this world."

But it is not only with the clergy that the Party comes into conflict in the Moslem border provinces. Matters are little better in the local Communist Party organs themselves. Local Moslem Communists cannot bring themselves to reject their religious beliefs and, while accepting the social and political program of Communism, repudiate its philosophical

and atheistic tenets of Marxism and Leninism, based on dialectical and historical materialism." On August 25, 1956, Sinkiang Jih Bao, stated: "Local nationalists hidden in the Party have collaborated with the local nationalists outside the Party and, trying to protect the interests of religion, have taken the stand that religion is above everything,.,. Each Party member should adopt a Communist materialist conception of the world and become true Communist."

Not content with this appeal to Party members and with direct attacks against Moslem believers, the Chinese Communists even carried their anti-religious campaign into the schools. Religious instruction was categorically forbidden in all schools, whether primary, secondary or at university level, and replaced by instruction in dialectical and historical materialism. Speaking on May 26, 1958, Liu Tin Min, a member of the Peking Politburo, explained this infringement of the Communist Constitution, which "guarantees" complete freedom of conscience and religious convictions by arguing that "In order to further unity between atheists and theists and to avoid conflict, theists should not go to public places outside churches and temples to preach religion".

In practice this means that theists are deprived of all opportunities for propagating their views outside the mosques, and sometimes even inside them, whereas atheists, as the abovementioned incidents in Sinin show, have the right to persecute religion both outside and within the mosque.

In conclusion it should be repeated that the dissatisfaction of the Moslem population in the Chinese border provinces with Communist rule is largely connected with religion. Resistance to Communism is regarded as a religious duty by all Moslems in China, whether of Chinese or Turkic descent, and their struggle against Communism takes on the nature of a holy war. This struggle has given rise to the concept of the liberation of all Chinese Moslems from the Communist yoke by the establishment of a Moslem Kingdom and its secession from China. Since most local Communists in the Chinese Moslem provinces are of Chinese nationality, Communism is regarded as a Chinese ideology. No small part in the development of this antagonism has been due to the attempted substitution of the Cyrillic for the Arab alphabet.

So far the Chinese Communists have not been able to overcome Chinese Moslem resistance and the struggle continues, a struggle which can only end in the defeat of Chinese Communism or in the destruction of Chinese Moslem religious institutions.

Without a doubt, Chinese Moslem unrest and the armed uprisings among Moslems in the provinces of Sinkiang, Kansu and Hopei contributed much toward the uprising in Tibet. Moslem resistances prevented

the Chinese from dealing rapidly with the Tibetan uprising, since their way to Tibet led through the Chinese Moslem provinces and in their operations against the Tibetans they found themselves faced with a hostile rear which prevented them from concentrating all their forces against the Tibetan rebels. The presence of recalcitrant Moslem provinces in the rear of the Chinese punitive troops also helps the Tibetans to continue their resistance to the Chinese Communists in the form of persistent partizan activity.

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- 1)Min Shu Huan, Peking, June 17, 1958
- 2)Anhwei Jih Pao, June 29, 1958
- 3)Hopei Jih Bao, January 11, 1950
- 4)SinHua, Peking, October 17, 1950
- 5)Le Mond, Paris, June 9, 1959